[Theme music ‘Some Spooky Sh*t Is Going On Here’ by Theo Goodwin]

INTRO

The Underwood Collection, Episode Ten: Tenants

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(Tape recorder clicks on. Tape static is heard continually throughout)

ULYSSES

Statement of Hari Bendt, regarding a… murderous gecko barn. Sure. Original statement given 4th September, 2008. Recording by UC Bamba, head curator of the Usher Foundation, Washington, DC.

Statement begins.

God, I don’t even know what to say about this. It was really weird, and nobody believes me. They probably shouldn’t, I did my research when I was trying to find out what happened. Geckos can’t live where it gets cold, and there’s no way there were so many lost pets all in one place.

And I don’t think those… things could have been pets.

I was just walking my dog, when I came across the old barn. We pass it on our normal route, and sometimes Milo - Bagpipes Milo, that’s my dog’s name - tries to pull if he sees something interesting. There’s been more

than one incident with a skunk, so I try to be careful, but that day he just managed to slip his leash.

He ran off through the tall grass and into the barn.

It's an old, beaten up thing. Big and unstable, weather-worn wood grey from age and exposure, with a big hole in the roof and siding falling off. Dangerous, so, people generally avoid it.

Milo was in there, though. He wouldn't come when I called him, not even with the promise of treats, so I decided to go get him. As I walked closer, I started to notice little quick movements across the wood.

They disappeared when I got closer, hiding on the other side of the wall or in the grass or just freezing to blend in. It's not unusual to find small animals in abandoned structures, so I brushed it off. Besides, I was more worried about Milo than the potential creepy-crawlies; I don't know if dogs can get tetanus, but I certainly didn't want to find out the hard way.

The barn doors hung open, two collapsing panels of wood held together by luck, leaning, and a handful of rusty nails. The interior seemed much… starker than it should have, the buttery evening light turning into something sharp and harsh when it filtered through the rotting roof. I could see Milo in there, growling at something sitting on the rough wall.

Milo's a sweet dog. He used to nip like any puppy, and still might accidentally catch you when he's playing tug-of-war, but he's generally quite gentle. Lets kids crawl over him, tolerates other pets, only chases squirrels to try and befriend them. I'd *never* heard him growl like that.

It was deep and heavy, an angry rumbling noise that resonated from his chest and seemed to vibrate the barn itself. Just one long, sustained note,

like he’d forgone the need to breathe in his rage.

Another noise, a higher piping sound, started to grow over the growl. It was almost musical, but it sent a wave of goosebumps over me in a way that I’d never experienced before. My skin felt cold and hot all at once, and prickled violently. I was still so worried about Milo, though, so I took a step forward.

As I did, the noise grew. Instead of one piping tone, the same thing over and over, it was dozens of different notes, all winding into each other and over Milo’s growling, a cacophony of music that made me want to tear out of my skin and into the air to put a violent end to whatever was making it.

The thing, as far as I could tell, was stuck to the wall in front of Milo. I looked it up, when I got home, still bloody and angry. It looked like a leopard gecko.

I could see its movement, in time with that first note. It made me so angry, and I just. Reacted.

Normally I’m not a violent person, and I’m not particularly strong, but I picked up a stone and hurled it at the gecko. I hit it, but the noise just got louder and louder, until it drowned out Milo entirely.

Then the gecko leaped at me, managing to get a good eight feet even with it’s mangled form. It’s body launched at my face, and I could see the strange, ridged patterns on its toe pads. When it hit me, it’s unreasonably long claws cut into my face. A foot landed on my lip, and sliced into it, while another landed on my cheek and two more hit my sunglasses. When I yelled - not screaming, I was angry, not afraid, or maybe afraid of how angry I was - and shook my head the shades came off with the front half of the gecko, but the thing kept hanging onto my face, the weight and

movement tearing deeper into me.

I managed to grab it, pry it off myself and fling it onto the ground, where I stomped on it just before Milo could attack it himself. When the small body crunched under my foot, the music stopped for a long moment, like my violence heralded the last note. I could feel blood running down my face from my cheek and lip, and more into my eye from a small nick around my eyebrow.

I was just about ready to grab Milo and sprint out of there when the music started again, but it was different, faster and anticipatory, and I finally looked closer at the interior of the barn.

There were geckos everywhere. Different species and sizes, but there was one every few feet. They were all contributing to that tune, and anger and adrenaline flooded my veins.

One of the geckos, what looked like a Tokay, jumped at me, landing on my arm and ripping through my shirt and into my skin. I grabbed at it, trying to tear it off but it bit me, locking its jaw firmly onto the flesh of my shoulder.

More geckos piled onto me *and* Milo, clawing and biting and doing their best to mar any unblemished skin or fur until we were bloody, ragged messes. We tried to return the favor, me stomping and grabbing and twisting their small, fragile bodies and Milo tearing and biting through them like they were cardboard.

There were so many, though, and they gave as good as they got. Almost. After what seemed like hours, the music finally died until it was a solitary, repeating note, and then Milo found the last gecko and everything went

silent. We were covered in blood and gore, panting and exhausted.

I was still so angry, but there was nothing more to do than to go home and patch ourselves up. I'm still angry, ready to tear through anything else like that, to rip and destroy and fight. It hasn't gone away. I'm not sure it *can*, at this point.

I tried to look into what might have happened, once I'd showered and managed to mostly stop the bleeding. I couldn't find any answers, except for what species those things looked like.

Nobody believes me, and nobody has any answers. Except maybe the Usher Foundation. So I'm here.

I want those answers. And I'm willing to fight to get them, if you won't give them to—

[*Phone ringing.*]

Oh, *come on,* don't tell me I— *Oh*.

[*Click.*]

Babe?

EVER
(Staticky, through a phone.)
U, where are you?

ULYSSES
I'm – I'm at work, why? Is everything okay?

EVER
Was everything okay at the house when you left this morning?

ULYSSES
I mean, should be. I don't keep lit candles in the office overnight anymore; so-

EVER
(Overlapping.)
The neighbors called the police.

ULYSSES
Wait, what?

EVER
Yeah. Um. I got some weird news about the second floor left-most room?

ULYSSES
That's my office.

EVER
I know.

ULYSSES
What's wrong with my office?

EVER
I think you should come home–

ULYSSES
No, no, no, what's wrong with my office?

EVER
There's – There's a couple hundred ant colonies living in the walls, babe. Started in the basement and just… Took over.

ULYSSES
There's *what-*

EVER
Yeah.

ULYSSES
But that's--

EVER
I’m sorry. I really am. It’s--

ULYSSES
There’s more, isn’t there?

EVER
(Hesitant.)
Well...

ULYSSES
Ever, I– Come on. Please.

EVER
...There’s apparently some damage to your work.

ULYSSES
No.

EVER
It’s not too extensive–

ULYSSES
No, no, that’s– that’s *not* happening–

EVER
Hey, it’s alright--

ULYSSES
No, no, no, no, those are all foundation files, I *need* those-

EVER
Hey.

ULYSSES
I need them, Ever!

EVER
Hey. Listen to me. I’m heading home now, and I’ll meet you there. Can you do that for me?

ULYSSES
I–

EVER
Can you meet me at home? Please?

ULYSSES
I– Yes. Right. I'll see you soon.

EVER
I love you.

ULYSSES
Love you too. Uh. Bye. – Oh, and end recording.

[*Tape recorder clicks on.*]

ADRIENE
Ulysses.

ULYSSES
Adriene – Hi, sorry, I– there's an emergency at home–

ADRIENE
(Deliberate.)
Wouldn't want to keep you from it.

ULYSSES
Oh. Okay?

ADRIENE
I imagine you'll be back in by the end of the day?

ULYSSES
Uh. I- I guess? I can– I can try, it's–

ADRIENE
Perhaps it didn't make sense to you the first time, Ulysses.

ULYSSES
I said I can try-

ADRIENE
(Continuing as if she hasn't noticed.)
I'm asking you to be back by the end of the day. Or at least send an email. I'd just want to make sure everything's alright.

ULYSSES
Right. Of course. Sorry, I– My husband called; there's apparently something of a– A *structural* issue with our house–

ADRIENE
Yes. And I did call the exterminators.

ULYSSES
What?

ADRIENE
You asked the other day. About the ants in your desk?

ULYSSES
Oh.

ADRIENE
Are you feeling alright?

ULYSSES
Can I -- Can I *go?*

ADRIENE
Of course. I'm just - Concerned.

ULYSSES
I'll send you that email.
[*Noises of shuffling around in a bag.*]
Hey, that's--

ADRIENE
You left this on.

ULYSSES
Oh. I was in the middle of a statement. Must have forgotten.

ADRIENE
They’re awfully loud, aren’t they?

ULYSSES
I guess so. Sorry, let me just turn this thing-

[*Tape recorder clicks off, then on.*]

[Just awful, terrible buzzing for 10 seconds or so.]

ULYSSES
Why won’t this thing *stop*--

[Tape recorder clicks.]

[Theme plays.]

OUTRO
The Underwood Collection is a podcast produced and distributed by the Pitch Library Creative Team. Find us on Twitter @PitchLibrary, on Tumblr at www.pitchlibrary.tumblr.com, or contact us by sending an email to usherfoundation@gmail.com. The Underwood Theme was written by Theodore Goodwin and the Underwood Logo was created by Mae B. Thank you for listening.

[Theme ends.]